DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 352 841 FL 020 879

TITLE A Survey of the Teaching and Learning of Modern Foreign Languages in a Sample of Inner City and Urban Schools, Spring Term 1989. A Report by HMI.
INSTITUTION Department of Education and Science, London (England).
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 20p.
AVAILABLE FROM Department of Education and Science, Publications Dispatch Centre, Honeypot Lane, Stanmore, Middlesex, England HA7, 1AZ, United Kingdom.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Attitudes; Audiovisual Aids; Classroom Techniques; Curriculum Design; Educational Assessment; Educational Quality; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; French; German; Institutional Characteristics; Instructional Effectiveness; Instructional Materials; Language of Instruction; Language Role; *Modern Languages; Organizational Climate; Second Language Instruction; *Second Languages; Spanish; Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Expectations of Students; *Teacher Qualifications; Teaching Skills; *Urban Schools; *Work Environment
IDENTIFIERS *England

ABSTRACT

A study investigated techniques and practices for teaching second languages (French, German, Spanish) in 25 urban schools in different areas of England. It was found that the overall quality of work in modern languages was very good in 1 school, good in 5, satisfactory in 7, less than satisfactory in 10, and poor in 2. Three of 10 lessons seen were good or very good. Nearly half were less than satisfactory, even in schools where good practice was expected. Specific features appeared to contribute most to successful learning: positive teacher attitudes and good teaching skills; high but realistic teacher expectations expressed in challenging but attainable tasks; thoughtful lesson planning, especially with use of lesson themes; extensive target language use with support to aid student comprehension; effective use of commonly available audiovisual aids; and administrative leadership and support. Several other factors appeared to be important, including qualified teaching staff, recent and appropriate inservice training, school-produced supplementary teaching resources targeting student interests, and placement by ability from an early age. Poor quality instruction was associated with low expectations, poor working atmosphere, little use of the target language, and lack of focus and purpose in lessons. School data and exemplary lesson descriptions are appended. (MSE)

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A SURVEY OF THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN A SAMPLE OF INNER CITY AND URBAN SCHOOLS

Spring Term 1989

A REPORT BY HMI

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REFERENCE: 140/90/NS

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APPENDICES 1 and 2

I INTRODUCTION

1. This survey sought to identify and describe good practice in the teaching and learning of modern foreign languages in a sample of inner city and other urban schools and to indicate the factors which were associated with successful learning, as well as those which were associated with poor work. Twenty-five schools were visited in Spring 1989. Nineteen were selected as likely to yield at least some examples of good practice. Nothing was known before the visits of the quality of work in the other six.

2. The schools were either situated in inner city areas or were schools with an intake with inner city characteristics, for instance serving large local authority housing estates and receiving substantial numbers of pupils from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Schools located in the inner city but drawing a substantial number of pupils from outside the inner city area, for instance selective schools and some voluntary aided schools, were excluded.

3. This report summarises the main findings of the survey and describes the evidence on which they are based. Appendix 1 gives details of the schools visited, the lessons and classes seen, the languages taught and the local education authorities (LEAs) visited. Appendix 2 describes four lessons exemplifying some features of good practice.

II MAIN FINDINGS

4. The overall quality of work in modern languages was very good in one school, good in five, broadly satisfactory in seven, less than satisfactory in ten and poor in two. Three out of ten lessons seen were good or very good, and just over another quarter were satisfactory. Nearly half the lessons were less than satisfactory and showed some or many shortcomings in important areas.

5. Thus although the intention of the survey was largely to identify good practice, a significant amount of less than satisfactory work was seen, even in schools where good practice had been expected.

6. The following features contributed most to successful learning. They helped to establish a climate in which pupils regarded language learning as a serious, worthwhile and often enjoyable business in which they could succeed and gain a sense of achievement.

(a) Positive attitudes on the part of the teacher to the teaching of languages and a good level of teaching skills were crucial.

(b) High but realistic expectations of the pupils expressed in challenging but attainable tasks, matched to the ability of the pupils.

(c) Thoughtful lesson planning and a well-organised approach to the work. Focussing a variety of activities on one principal theme was particularly effective in securing learning.

(d) Extensive use of the target language in lessons, at a level appropriate to the class, supported by a repertoire of techniques designed to assist pupils to understand. In these circumstances, pupils were not deterred by the teacher's use of the foreign language, but developed skills of understanding and positive attitudes towards attempting to speak the language themselves.

(e) The effective use of commonly available audiovisual aids (AVA) and the imaginative use of other simple resources, leading to active participation by pupils.

(f) The leadership, influence and support of a effective head of department and the existence of an adequate scheme of work had beneficial effects on the work of other teachers.

7. Several other factors also appeared to be important in establishing work of good quality, and the most successful departments exemplified most if not all of them. They included: appropriately qualified and linguistically competent teaching staff; recent, appropriate in-service training; attention to the classroom environment and display; the use of school-produced teaching resources, aimed at the interests of particular groups, to supplement commercial textbooks; and setting by ability in modern languages from a fairly early stage.

8. There was also a positive connection between quality of work, the take-up of modern languages at the option stage and the achievement of satisfactory external examination results.

9. The most important of the factors associated with work of poor quality were:

(a) Low expectations resulting in tasks being set which made too few demands on pupils.

(b) Failure to establish a proper working atmosphere.

(c) Pupils heard too little of the foreign language to develop the ability to understand and speak it outside a narrow range of prescribed situations.

(d) The activities in many lessons lacked focus and a clear purpose and were presented in ways which failed to interest and involve the pupils.

10. The survey showed that the same sort of teaching and learning experience which succeeds in other schools can also succeed in inner city and urban schools. Pupils in these schools are perhaps less motivated to foreign language learning and less inclined to tolerate dull teaching. This reinforces the need for their teachers to have positive attitudes, high expectations, good teaching skills and sound linguistic competence. Many teachers who exemplified good practice had undertaken in-service activities to up-date their language skills and classroom methodology. It was evident that others needed such up-dating.

III THE QUALITY OF WORK

Overview

11. While pupils' achievement in understanding and speaking varied according to their ability level, in successful lessons there was clear evidence of learning taking place or having taken place. This included understanding recorded speech, memorising new vocabulary through intensive practice, asking and answering questions with a good standard of fluency and accuracy, adapting language learned in one context to a different situation, and (in the case of some able pupils) combining language from different topics. In some cases, the learning was within fairly limited parameters: for example, pupils developed good speaking and comprehension skills in the narrow context of the units of a graded test scheme; some less able pupils achieved limited but, for them, realistic objectives. 12. Even in relatively successful lessons reading was often confined to materials whose main purpose was to stimulate oral work or writing. Since the language of these was familiar, most pupils could cope with its limited demands. Opportunities for extended reading were not common. Many of the more successful lessons provided opportunities for more or less guided writing, based largely on the pupils' own interests and experience, but much of the written work amounted to little more than copying or the completion of stereotyped exercises. Accuracy in writing, apart from copying, was hard to achieve for a majority of pupils. 13. In lessons which were less than satisfactory the general standard of work was low. For example, pupils were ignorant of basic vocabulary, their pronunciation was poor, their attainment slight and they made little if any observable progress. Many pupils had only a limited capacity to understand simple questions and formulate answers, despite in some cases having a certain ability to perform rehearsed language.

Understanding

14. In approximately three out of ten lessons the standard of understanding of the spoken foreign language shown by the pupils was judged to be good or quite good. In another three it was satisfactory and in another three again it was less than satisfactory or poor. In one lesson in ten pupils heard too little of the foreign language for a judgement to be possible.

15. In the most successful lessons pupils showed their ability to understand the foreign language spoken by the teacher by responding promptly and confidently. For example, in one French lesson, some able pupils in year 11 answered questions on holidays with sentences of some length while others provided briefer answers with little hesitation. In another school, pupils of average ability and below in year 10 responded well to challenging questions in German about school timetables asked by the foreign language assistant as well as by the teacher. Able year 9 pupils in another school were well able to follow the whole of a lesson in which the teacher used only German for organising the work of the class, including drawing attention to errors. Less able year 7 pupils in a secondary modern school coped successfully in a lesson in which the teacher spoke French almost exclusively, using an appropriately limited range of language within a defined context. In such lessons as these the pupils' understanding of the foreign language used by their teachers for the greater part of the lesson was good and in some cases virtually total. In no cases were pupils put off by extensive use of the foreign language.

16. Pupils in successful lessons were also able to understand much of the content of recorded dialogues spoken by native speakers. Even in these lessons understanding was more often than not tested by questions in English to be answered in English. However, in a minority of classes, pupils were required to show their understanding by answering questions orally in the foreign language. For instance in one class, year 9 pupils of average ability noted their answers in English when listening to

a direction–giving dialogue and later used these as a cue to give oral answers in French. Some year 11 pupils of average ability and below successfully recalled in French what they had heard in a recording. In two other lessons, with groups of average ability and below, pupils used symbols and picture worksheets to record their answers and were then able to reply in French when the teachers checked their understanding. Able year 11 boys wrote brief answers in Spanish to open–ended questions on a recorded text and gave fluent and accurate responses when the answers were checked. In these lessons pupils of all levels of ability not only attained good standards in understanding recorded native speakers, but were also able to retain and reuse language items which they had heard. In all but one of the examples quoted above, the teachers conducted the lesson entirely or largely in the foreign language, and this had enabled pupils to develop their ability to understand it.

17. Where answers to listening comprehension questions written in English were also checked and discussed in English, this reduced the amount of the foreign language to which the learners were exposed. Sometimes teachers intervened too quickly to assist pupils during recorded listening comprehension exercises. This meant that the pupils did not have to listen attentively to the recorded native speaker; nor were they learning to piece together an overall meaning from the elements which they could understand. Very rarely was an extract replayed during the checking of answers to enable pupils to listen again for what they, or some of them, were unsure about. In short, listening comprehension was too often used as a test instead of being used to develop pupils' listening skills.

18. Less than satisfactory lessons were conducted largely in English and pupils had limited opportunities to develop comprehension skills. Their levels of understanding, whether of the teacher or of recorded native speakers, were low. In one school less able pupils in year 8 made wild guesses in English about the meaning of French words presented with the help of flashcards. In another, year 10 pupils of average ability could produce few answers to the teacher's questions on the topic of food and drink and completely failed to understand the different tenses used in the questions. Pupils in these lessons had only a limited understanding of occasional words and, in some cases, little understanding at all of foreign language recordings. They simply did not hear enough of the foreign language spoken by the teacher to develop the skills of understanding.

Speaking

19. The standards achieved by pupils in speaking the foreign language were lower than those in understanding. In a quarter of lessons they were good or quite good, in a fifth they were satisfactory and in two–fifths less than satisfactory. In one lesson in eight, pupils spoke so little of the foreign language that no judgement could be made.

20. In absolute terms standards varied according to the ability of the pupils involved. For a class of less able beginners, their ability to recognise, recall and pronounce correctly a range of vocabulary items represented no mean achievement. A set of low ability pupils, mainly boys, in year 9 who could operate a small number of sentence structures in conjunction with a useful range of vocabulary associated with food and drink also reached what was for them a satisfactory standard. Some able pupils in year 8 were confident, prompt and accurate when practising booking a hotel room. The able year 11 boys referred to in paragraph 16 not only answered questions fluently and accurately in Spanish but later in this lesson adapted sentence patterns learned in one situation to new contexts. In all of these instances the teacher spoke the foreign language for all or most of the lesson, the pupils accepted this as normal and spoke the language with good or at least acceptable pronunciation.

21. Working in pairs or groups provided a situation in which some pupils were more ready to speak than in whole class teaching. Able pupils in year 11 in one school made good use of newly acquired German expressions when working in pairs to say what jobs they would like to do and why. Some average and able pupils in a year 10 French class described themselves and their interests to other members of a group of four or five after learning appropriate expressions during the earlier part of the lesson. However, in poor lessons, the monitoring of pupils' oral work when they worked in pairs or groups was superficial and ineffective, the activity went on too long and pupils spoke too much English.

22. In less than satisfactory lessons the pupils' ability to use the target language was very limited. Many pupils clearly expected to speak English to the teacher. When they were required to answer questions in the foreign language their responses were hesitant, brief and poorly pronounced. Lack of vocabulary was a serious obstacle, as in the case of a year 11 group of upper and middle ability pupils who were uncertain about basic shopping vocabulary in French. Another year 11 group of similar ability did not know some common French verbs even as vocabulary items.

23. In several lessons pupils were able to perform, more or less adequately, role-play dialogues where the responses were predictable, but proved incapable of answering simple spontaneous questions on the same topic. For example an able year 10 group who were apparently fluent when practising direction-giving dialogues were unable to give directions on how to reach the railway station in their town. Similarly in a lesson devoted to listening to recorded weather forecasts, year 10 pupils in a mixed ability group could not describe the real weather conditions.

24. In some lessons pupils heard and spoke virtually nothing in the target language. An example was a French lesson with year 9 pupils of average ability on the countries bordering France. In some cases oral work consisted of no more than reading aloud.

25. Pupils' attitudes to speaking the foreign language were strongly influenced by the extent to which their teachers used it during lessons. Their confidence and competence in speaking it were related to the opportunities which they were regularly given to speak it.

Reading

26. In over half the lessons seen there was no reading activity at all or too little on which to base a judgement. In those where there was sufficient, the reading materials normally consisted of worksheets produced by the teacher, dialogues written in language with which the pupils were already familiar, brief passages or exercises in text-books and, occasionally, short accounts or dialogues to be reconstructed from jumbled sentences. Such materials were intended as stimuli to speaking or writing rather than for developing reading skills or fostering interest in reading the foreign language. There were few opportunities for more extended reading. Against this background of limited challenge, in nearly two-thirds of the lessons where a judgement was made, the standards achieved by pupils were satisfactory, including a quarter where they were good or quite good. In the remaining third they were less than satisfactory or poor.

27. In one of the more successful lessons, pupils in year 10 read descriptions of various people on mock dating agency cards and then matched them in appropriate pairings. Later they read extracts from an agony column. These materials were of genuine interest to the pupils, who were encouraged to persevere with reading them; they also furnished words and expressions which the pupils later successfully used in oral activities. In a school where pupils frequently worked in groups,

differentiated reading tasks were set, based on documents connected with youth hostels and other residential centres in France. Occasionally materials were not accurately matched to the ability level of the pupils. Thus the majority of a class of able year 10 pupils were reading elementary French readers while others in the class were able to understand magazines which they had bought and which had a more appropriate level of language and more sophisticated content. In another school, year 8 pupils had German readers of a similar standard, but many of the mixed ability group knew so little German that they could not identify the superficial details required to answer worksheet questions, far less actually follow the story. Finally, in a lesson which was typical of the least successful, 11 year old beginners read aloud from a French worksheet, making gross errors of pronunciation which were not corrected. In all schools there was little evidence of reading being set as homework.

Writing

28. Judgements were made on the standards of pupils' written work in just under half the lessons seen. The standards were good or quite good in a fifth of these, satisfactory in twofifths and less than satisfactory or poor in two–fifths. As in the case of reading, many written tasks were undemanding, consisting typically of copying vocabulary lists, fixed phrases and dialogues, completing gap–filling exercises and in some cases copying or writing dictated notes in English. Reconstructing dialogues or narratives from jumbled sentences involved only copying once the rearranging had been decided. Many pupils, including those in groups described by the school as less able, performed such limited tasks satisfactorily, although the standard of presentation and accuracy in copying sometimes fell below a satisfactory level. However, independent writing, when it was required, posed problems which many pupils had difficulty coping with, even when their oral work was satisfactory or better. Thus in one school, year 11 pupils who achieved creditable standards in oral work produced written work which, though comprehensible, was very inaccurate in terms of spelling and grammar. In another school many pupils in a mixed ability group in year 11 wrote most verbs in the infinitive form. In some lessons seen, classes were set difficult writing tasks for homework, for which there had been little or no preparation. Much marking of written work was cursory and ignored gross errors.

29. Many of the more successful lessons provided opportunities both in the lesson and for homework for writing which was more or less closely guided by the teacher, based largely on the pupils' own interests and experience. However, in years 10 and 11, the writing was often too closely circumscribed, limited in range and used largely or only the present tense. One school, where the written work was generally satisfactory or better, exemplified much of the good practice that was observed. Most of the written work throughout the school included free writing, mainly in the form of letters, pen portraits and the results of mini–enquiries conducted in the classroom. A group of able year 8 boys in their second term of learning German had already written items of personal information, letters, a summary of friends' likes and dislikes, as well as work on birthdays of famous people, all of which linked closely to the topics they had dealt with in oral work. They had also written letters to tourist information offices in Germany and received replies.

IV FACTORS INFLUENCING THE QUALITY OF WORK

30. A number of factors were consistently associated with successful lessons in which there was evidence of learning and pupils achieved high standards of work. The most notable of these were the positive attitudes and high expectations of the teachers, their teaching skills, the match of work to the learners' needs and abilities, the use of the target language as the normal means of communication during lessons, focussing a variety of activities on a single theme, and the active participation of the pupils. Poor lessons where pupils failed to learn were marked by the absence of some or all of these factors.

Teachers' attitudes, expectations and teaching skills

31. A positive approach by teachers to pupils' learning and a good level of teaching skills were crucial to success. Good teachers had high but realistic expectations and recognised the value of encouragement and discriminating praise for effort and good work. Thorough planning, efficient management of resources, and attention to the classroom environment, including display, created a business-like impression of serious work. Where, on the other hand, teachers were not convinced of the value of teaching a foreign language to all pupils or to less able pupils, their expectations of their pupils were too low. The atmosphere in many classrooms was good-natured, but undemanding. In a few cases relationships were poor. Too often a work-centred atmosphere was not established: lessons started slowly, demands were low and the pace was too relaxed. In a small number of lessons, class control was unsatisfactory.

Match of work to learners' needs

32. Good lessons had worthwhile and attainable objectives. The tasks set were closely matched to the ability level of the class, so that most pupils felt that success was possible and obtained a sense of achievement. The important factor was that, at the planning stage, the teacher had devised activities which presented an appropriate challenge and yet gave a reasonable chance of success, with the content and the approach matched to the ability of the teaching group. This occurred more often when teaching groups were based on ability. A third of the lessons where pupils were grouped by ability were good or very good, as against only one in five where the classes were of mixed ability.

33. In poor lessons the work was not matched appropriately even to the general level of the class, with tasks set that were too difficult for pupils to cope with or alternatively too easy to present any challenge.

Variety and Focus

34. A significant feature of a number of successful lessons was that a variety of activities, tasks and materials all focussed on the chosen theme or topic. This provided a coherent experience for pupils, who were clear about what they were learning and made sound progress. Less successful lessons often featured a variety of activities, but lacked a clear focus. Pupils were switched bewilderingly from one theme to another and stayed on none for long enough to consolidate learning. Some activities were excessively complex and pupils did not always receive clear directions, even in English, for what they were supposed to do and how they should do it.

Active participation

35. The involvement and active participation of the majority of pupils, whether in whole class teaching or in pair or group work, were the hallmark of successful lessons. Pupils were often more willing to speak when working in pairs or groups, but commonly the pace of the lesson dropped at such times. Some teachers maintained a brisk pace by setting a time limit for these activities. Some very successful lessons were seen in which the teacher was the focus but ensured, through skilful questioning and organisation of activities, that pupils were active and learning throughout.

Use of the target language as the normal means of communication

36. An important factor in successful lessons was the willingness and ability of teachers to make extensive use of the foreign language in lessons. They used the language not only in connection with the theme of the lesson, eg for teaching vocabulary and structures, questioning and modelling role

play situations, but also to give praise, to make requests, in some cases to organise and explain tasks and activities, and for much of the incidental talk of the lesson, even including the occasional reprimand. Some referred in the foreign language to incidents which occurred during the lesson and in these instances the context helped pupils to understand what was said. A few teachers gave explanations of the tasks set in English, but otherwise spoke the foreign language. Many teachers had a confident and fluent command of the language. Others acknowledged that their command of the language was less than perfect, but were nevertheless determined to make maximum use of it in their lessons.

37. Conversely, the commonest failing in poor lessons was insufficient use of the target language. Some teachers did not have the necessary command of the language to do more than model a limited number of expressions and ask simple questions. Many maintained that to use it extensively would mean losing the attention of the pupils. Frequently the target language was used for greetings and farewells and to practice vocabulary, essential structures and role play dialogues, but English was used for every other purpose and for long periods of the lesson. In such cases, pupils heard too little of the language to develop the ability to understand it or to speak it outside prescribed contexts. This was illustrated in classes where pupils performed well-rehearsed dialogues of the type required for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) with a degree of competence, but had great difficulty in understanding and responding to simple, unrehearsed questions or requests.

38. Some teachers showed sensitivity to the needs of their pupils, either as a whole class or as individuals, by occasionally checking on their understanding (one teacher did this in the foreign language, asking "Was ist das auf englisch?", thus reducing the amount of English spoken to an absolute minimum), by giving brief explanations in English, or by the "private" use of English with individuals during oral pair work. One stressed the importance of being ready to make sensible guesses about the meaning of unfamiliar words. Others allowed pupils to ask questions in English, but gave answers in the foreign language, or alternatively allowed some pupils to answer questions in English. In these cases the flow of interaction in the foreign language was largely maintained.

39. When talk in the foreign language was pitched at an appropriate linguistic level and pupils were helped to understand by the use of visual aids, real objects, mime and demonstration, they accepted it, tolerated occasional uncertainties and were developing, or had developed, the skill of aural comprehension sufficiently to enable them to cope with extensive use of the target language by the teacher. In these lessons pupils were also willing to try to respond in the foreign language and many did so creditably, with good pronunciation and intonation.

Use of resources

40. In successful lessons, effective use was made of resources, most frequently cassette recorders, worksheets and flashcards. The overhead projector (OHP) was not commonly used, but some teachers exploited it to considerable effect. Cassette recorders were normally used for listening comprehension exercises, but occasionally by pupils to record their own work. This assisted their learning and had an evident motivating effect. Language laboratories, video-recording and computers were used in a very small number of lessons, but the tasks which the pupils were set made few demands on them. Although the use of display as a teaching aid was rarely planned, a few teachers used it to help explain words and were thus able to avoid the use of English. Others encouraged pupils to use items from classroom display in role-play dialogues and the manipulation of such "props" indicated that the pupils understood what they were saying. The imaginative use of relatively

simple aids enabled teachers to match the content and level of the learning materials to the attainment level of the pupils and thereby maintain the flow of foreign language.

41. In the best lessons, all necessary resources were easily accessible, with items such as the OHP and cassette recorders set up ready for use. Significantly, this was the case even in classrooms which were relatively small and crowded, because the importance of having equipment available for immediate use as required was recognised. Teaching materials which appealed to the interests of the particular group of pupils made a significant contribution to the success of some lessons. These had usually been prepared in the school, sometimes adapted from authentic materials. Many poor lessons would have been greatly improved by a more imaginative presentation of learning materials, using the OHP and other visual aids. Often such equipment was available but not used.

Correction of errors

42. In a considerable number of lessons, there was little or no attempt to correct errors made by pupils in speaking the foreign language. This was usually a deliberate policy, aimed at not discouraging pupils from speaking. Many teachers adopted a flexible approach, depending on the ability of individual pupils, and this provided a measure of differentiation. Only a tiny number of teachers noted common errors without interrupting the flow of activity, in order to give them more explicit attention later. Some were skilled at interjecting, in a natural manner, a corrected version of what a pupil had said, in order that all should hear the correct model. In general, however, less attention than was desirable was given to the correction of quite serious errors of pronunciation and accuracy.

Development of accuracy

43. Few lessons included strategies designed to develop confidence for oral work by deliberately encouraging pupils to focus closely on aspects such as key vocabulary or gender. One of these was a German lesson with pupils of average ability and above. After reading items from the textbook aloud after the teacher, pupils had two minutes of private reading before being asked questions to see what they could recall. Later they had a further two minutes of private study to memorise the gender of the words, followed by a quiz to consolidate their learning. In another school, in a Spanish lesson with able 15-year olds, there were frequent rapid checks on what the pupils had learned as the lesson progressed. As a result the pupils were well prepared to understand a recorded listening text and able to give confident and accurate responses to questions on it. At the end of this lesson, time was allowed for the pupils to write down essential expressions as a further means of consolidating their learning. Such planned and systematic approaches to develop accuracy were, however, extremely rare and might be more widely adopted with more able learners.

Assessment

44. In some schools, positive assessment techniques appeared to have a motivating effect on pupils. Sometimes these were related to end of unit tests or tests of graded objectives and sometimes to profiling or departmental records of achievement which included self-assessment statements. Surprisingly, in view of the emphasis on oral skills, some departments made no attempt to assess these formally other than in graded tests. Informal monitoring of oral activities in lessons did not usually lead to written records of performance. In most schools written work was usually regularly seen and marked, but there were few examples of more comprehensive and coherent policy and practice of assessment. Only ten schools had satisfactory practice overall, and this did not always stem from a clear policy. By and large, the quality of assessment matched that of the work observed in lessons.

V OTHER FACTORS RELATED TO THE QUALITY OF WORK

45. As well as features of classroom practice, aspects of leadership, management and organisation also had a bearing on the quality of work. In turn the quality of work was related to pupils' attitudes and behaviour, the take-up of languages beyond year 9 and external examination results. This section considers these issues.

Leadership

46. In five of the six schools where the overall quality of work was good or very good, the departments were well led and managed. Notable features of these departments were team spirit, high morale, positive approaches to teaching and learning, effective planning, and the provision, efficient organisation and good use of a wide range of resources, which in four cases were largely produced within the school.

Schemes of work

47. Twenty-one of the 25 modern languages departments had a scheme of work at the time they were visited. However, fewer than one-third of these were satisfactory. The rest were either insufficiently broad or lacked detailed guidance, especially on teaching method. Adequate schemes did not always translate into good classroom practice. However, three of the four good schemes were found in schools producing good work overall, while 11 of the 12 schools where work was less than satisfactory also had inadequate schemes.

Setting and mixed ability grouping

48. While schools generally set pupils by ability in modern languages in the second or third years of foreign language learning (normally year 8 or year 9), five of those visited in the survey continued mixed ability grouping in year 9; three of these also did so in years 10 and 11. In these three, the overall quality of work was less than satisfactory or poor. The main cause of this was undoubtedly that the pedagogical difficulties of mixed ability teaching had not been adequately addressed. Eleven of the 12 schools where results at GCSE were judged satisfactory or better set pupils in ability groups in years 8 or 9. By contrast, of the five schools which continued mixed ability grouping into year 9 or beyond, only one obtained satisfactory external examination results at 16+ and these were achieved in Urdu by pupils of South Asian background. Pupils' attitudes and commitment

49. In successful lessons pupils were interested, well motivated, committed, industrious and attentive. They had positive attitudes to their lessons and to the learning of the language in question. In poor lessons they lacked confidence and enthusiasm and had low motivation. Their behaviour ranged from quiet resignation through restlessness to occasional disruption.

Take-up beyond year 9

50. While almost all pupils in the survey schools studied a foreign language until at least the end of year 9, the proportion who continued for a further two years varied considerably. In one school, a foreign language formed part of the compulsory curriculum in years 10 and 11; this was a school in which 84% of the pupils were of South Asian background and the language studied by most was Urdu. In eight schools over 50% continued, but in nine fewer than one-third did so. The overall average was just over 40%, about ten percentage points lower than the national average take-up at the time of the survey. In the six schools where the quality of work was good or very good, take-up

averaged 44%; in those where it was less than satisfactory or poor, the average optional take-up was only 30%. Only 3% of the pupils in years 10 and 11 studied two languages.

51. Eleven of the schools had sixth forms (years 12 and 13). In five there were no students taking modern languages at General Certificate of Education Advanced level (GCE A-level) and in only one, a boys' 13-18 comprehensive, did the proportion of sixth formers taking A-level in modern languages exceed 10%. Because many of the schools without sixth forms showed good practice, it is not possible to relate take-up post-16 to the quality of teaching and learning pre-16.

The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE)

52. Pupils' success in gaining graded results in the GCSE examination varied greatly but was generally at a lower level than the national average. This might be expected in a sample which included at least eight schools (two of them secondary modern schools) which had few if any pupils of high ability. Taking this into consideration, GCSE results were judged satisfactory or better in half the schools. Over the whole sample the quality of performance in the GCSE examinations closely matched that of the work seen. Four schools gained good results and in all four, the overall quality of work was satisfactory or better. Of the twelve schools in which the work was less than satisfactory, only two achieved satisfactory examination results.

VI STAFFING AND RESOURCES

53. Over 90% of the teaching of modern languages in the schools visited was carried out by trained specialist staff. Most were graduates and almost 40% were qualified in more than one foreign language. Although 30% were involved in some teaching of a language in which they held no higher qualification, in most cases the amount was small. Some of these staff had sufficient language competence for the level of the groups they were seen teaching, though others lacked sufficient command of the language to make confident or in some cases any spontaneous use of it. Foreign language assistants were appointed to 12 of the schools, representing 11 of the 18 LEAs in which visits were made. However, only a small minority had a full-time assistant, even for the main language taught.

54. The amount of modern language related in-service training in which staff in the survey schools had engaged varied greatly. Not infrequently there was an evident need for up-dating in language skills and methodology, particularly where staff had recently returned to teaching. In schools where the overall quality of work was good, most staff had been involved in appropriate in-service training and had maintained frequent contact with countries where the languages are spoken. In some schools only one member of staff, usually the head of department, had been involved to any extent. The features which, in combination, constituted good in-service experience were regular attendance at courses or workshops concerned with teaching methods, regular and relevant visits abroad, and good support from the LEA adviser for modern languages. Overall, the amount of in-service training was judged to be adequate in only half the schools.

55. Nine out of ten lessons took place in rooms designated for modern languages teaching and where basic facilities were adequate for this purpose. Nineteen departments had accommodation that was judged to be satisfactory or better. Display enhanced many classrooms and was very good in most of the schools with good work.

56. Resources overall were rated satisfactory in only 12 departments. Eleven had insufficient textbooks for all pupils to have a copy to take home. In some cases not even older pupils had one; in others, there were enough books, but pupils were not allowed to keep a copy, on the grounds that many would not care for or return them. Pupils whose circumstances might already be unfavourable for study were thus further deprived. Many teachers produced or compiled resources themselves, even where adequate supplies of textbooks were available. Work of good quality was in every case supported with sufficient non–book material, all well used.

57. Adequate audio–visual equipment — cassette recorders, overhead projectors, television, etc — was available in three–quarters of the schools, but efficiently and effectively used in less than half. All six schools achieving good overall standards used their AVA well. In those schools where, for one reason or another, accommodation was unsatisfactory, so too was the use of AVA.

58. Apart from their direct contribution to learning, the visible, orderly and purposeful deployment in the classroom of a range of resources conveyed a business–like and stimulating impression of language learning. Overall, however, resources were judged to be adequately supporting pupils' learning in only half the schools. Nevertheless, adequacy did not relate solely to the amount of money which departments were given: it was the imagination and foresight with which money was spent and the energy devoted to making what could not be bought, which made the difference.

VII CONCLUSIONS

59. Effective foreign language teaching requires teachers who are linguistically competent and have a sound understanding of methodology, allied to the will and the skill to put it into effect. Many teachers in this sample of schools possessed these qualities and had often undertaken in–service activity to develop them further. Their pupils were committed and were making good progress.

60. However, the general situation in the survey schools was far from reassuring. It is particularly disturbing that nearly half the lessons seen had shortcomings in important areas. For the good practice found in a minority of schools to be more widely extended the following major issues need to be addressed:

— the development of positive attitudes to the teaching of modern languages to a wide range of pupils;

— higher expectations of what pupils can achieve;

— improved teaching skills, particularly involving greater use of the target language in the classroom;

— the selection and use of materials which more closely reflect the needs and interests of the pupils.

61. Attention to these factors would enable a higher proportion of young people to develop the practical skills of effective communication in a foreign language.

APPENDIX 1

1 The Schools

a) Twenty–five schools were visited in January and February 1989. They were located in 18 different LEAs: 15 of them were in the North of England, five in the Midlands, and five in the South. Five schools had over 50% of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds and seven had between 10% and 35%; the remainder had fewer than 10%. The highest percentage in any school was 84%.

b) **Types of school**

11–16 comprehensive	9	(8 mixed, one boys)
12–16 "	2	(1 mixed, one boys)
11–18 "	6	(4 mixed, two boys)
13–18 " upper schools	5	(3 mixed, one boys, one girls)
secondary modern	2	(1 mixed, one girls)
9–13 middle school	1	

2 Lessons seen 175

124 French, 30 German, 18 Spanish, 1 Urdu, 2 Panjabi.

3 Number of classes seen by year group

Year 6 (in middle school)	2 classes
Year 7	17 "
Year 8	35 "
Year 9	46 "
Year 10	35 "
Year 11	33 "
Year 12 and 13	7 "

4 Ability of classes as defined by school

Upper ability	46
Broadly middle ability	52
Lower ability	21
Mixed ability	56

5 Languages taught

French was offered as first foreign language in all schools; it was the sole first language in 14.

Ten schools had some kind of arrangement for diversification, allocating pupils to one language or another, or allowing them to choose. Three of these were 13–18 upper schools. In six schools there were two joint first languages (three French and German, three French and Spanish), in two schools pupils chose from three languages and in one (a 13–18 upper school) from four. One school taught French and German in alternate years.

Another school taught French and Spanish to almost all its pupils.

The second foreign language was German in nine schools, Spanish in one. Eight of the schools which admitted

pupils at age 11 or 12 offered no second language.
One or more South Asian languages were taught in six schools, in two only in years 12 and 13, but in two they were offered as first language. In one of these Urdu was studied by the overwhelming majority of the pupils.

6 Local Education Authorities of the Schools visited

Berkshire	(1)
Bolton	(2)
Bradford	(2)
Bromley	(1)
Croydon	(1)
Cumbria	(1)
Derbyshire	(1)
Hampshire	(2)
Leicestershire	(1)
Newcastle	(2)
Northamptonshire	(2)
Oldham	(1)
Rochdale	(1)
South Tyneside	(1)
Stockport	(2)
Sunderland	(1)
Trafford	(2)
Wiltshire	(1)

APPENDIX 2

The following lessons exemplify some of the features of good practice described in the report.

Lesson 1 — French — year 10. average and more able pupils

The theme was personal information, in which the teacher considered that the pupils needed revision. After two minutes revision of questions, the pupils listened to a recording of a boy in year 11 being interviewed by the teacher and marked off his answers on a grid. Most understood first time. Next the OHP was used to present two lists of personal details (in note form to avoid the temptation to translate). The teacher asked questions to which pupils gave full answers. The teacher used French throughout and kept up a demanding pace, but gave lots of encouragement, particularly to weaker pupils. Pupils also asked questions. The constantly changing activities, comings and goings, use of recording and OHP, pupils asking and answering questions and a girl being sent outside to rehearse a fictitious identity — all generated subject matter for the teacher to talk about in French, while ensuring that non–linguistic clues aided understanding. The girl who had been outside was then interviewed: her identity was a local one (the teacher makes deliberate use of examples which involve pupils' interests). The pupils then worked efficiently in pairs using information–gap cards (made by pupils) to interview each other. The HMI invited two girls to "interview" him, which they did effectively although they mixed up "tu" and "vous". Later the pupils were given about 20 minutes (of the 70 minute period) to write a letter including the same range of details.

In this lesson the key factors were planning, resource preparation, relationships and high expectations. The lesson was varied but coherent, conducted entirely in French (though the teacher admitted that her command was not perfect) at a brisk but realistic pace, and involved the pupils' interests. The standard of oral and written response was high.

Lesson 2 — French — year 11, average and less able pupils

This was the second half of a 70 minute period, at the end of the day. The pupils had heard a recorded listening comprehension text and written answers in English to questions in English. However, before asking for the English answer, the teacher asked pupils to recall what they had heard in French. The pupils coped successfully with this. The teacher then showed simple, home–made flashcards in various combinations as the stimulus for pupils to request hotel rooms of different types. Again they did this competently. Next the teacher asked questions about the positions of various people in the classroom to revise prepositions. This was in preparation for another recorded listening comprehension exercise, in which hotel clients asked questions of the receptionist to enquire where various rooms were situated in the hotel. The pupils indicated the location of the rooms on a simple plan of the hotel. In going over the task, the pupils had to say what they had heard the receptionist say in French, before indicating the answer in English. Finally, they had to work out the meanings of typical hotel notices, which were written on a worksheet.

This successful lesson was almost entirely centred on the teacher, but the pupils were motivated by her enthusiasm and energy, by tasks which were presented in visually intriguing ways using simple home–made resources (the flashcards, hotel plan and hotel notices), by a non–dogmatic consideration of valid alternatives to the "correct" answer, and by appropriate challenge in terms of the teacher's use of French and the requirement that they should understand and use French themselves. Although the teacher used English at times, she accepted that this was not always necessary in view of the pupils' evident ability to understand the target language, spoken simply.

Lesson 3 — German — year 7, mixed ability

This lesson was the first half of a 70 minute double period. First there was revision of spelling in German, including a choral version of the alphabet. This lively start got all the pupils involved. Then the teacher

introduced the topic, telling the time, with a brief explanation in English of the structure involved. However, she used much German to talk about all sorts of incidental events. Pupils responded keenly and were soon challenged to guess what was required by "Wie spat ist/war es in/vor zwei Stunden?" — and congratulated on their success. The teacher emphasised that sensible guessing is an essential strategy in language learning. The clear planning and staged progression of the lesson enabled the pupils to succeed. Short bouts of brisk pair work, never longer than two minutes, gave them the opportunity to practice intensively on their own and reinforce each stage of their learning. At one point the teacher put on a hat labelled "Auskunft" and pretended to be a railway official. The pupils asked her the time. She responded using the 24 hour clock — another challenge for the pupils.

This lesson was marked by the rapid pace, constant challenge, reinforcement through pair work, praise for success, and the teacher's use of German for incidental talk as well as for the topic of the lesson.

Lesson 4 — French — year 7, low ability

The theme was the cafe. Pupils practised saying the names of drinks and snacks as the teacher showed, first, flashcards and then simple sketches on the OHP. She then masked items on the OHP and pupils had to identify which of the 16 items was hidden. The teacher gave the incidental instructions (eg "fermez les yeux") in French. Most pupils were able to identify the concealed item and displayed pleasure and enthusiasm. Then the teacher showed a similar OHP transparency, this time with the words written in French instead of sketches. First individuals read the names, mostly with good pronunciation. Then they repeated the game of identifying the masked item. In view of their success the teacher challenged them to identify two masked items. Many succeeded at this too. Finally they played picture lotto in French, each pupil quickly drawing six items from the 16 practised and crossing them off as the teacher "ordered" items. Successful pupils called out their six items in French at the end of each game. The objectives of this enjoyable and successful lesson were simple, but worthwhile and attainable. Varied resources all focussed on the one theme and provided sufficient opportunities for the pupils to consolidate their learning.